

Education Project III

Project Summary

The broad goal of this project is to develop a practical understanding of how language is used across various professional contexts in the MENA region. Power dynamics related to gender and socio-economic status will be explored as a means of explaining and remediating gender gaps in employment and addressing social mobility for young Egyptians and MENA citizens, particularly in rural areas.

Introduction

Participating students in the GSE Tomorrow's Leaders initiative will engage in research to determine 1) ways of improving quality of, in, and through education; and 2) determine the nature of discourse intersections of professional communities throughout the MENA region. Economic growth and civic involvement depend, in large part, on the capacity of citizens and employees to understand 1) the discourses of the disciplines (e.g., disciplinary literacy; Wolsey et al., 2012; 2016), and 2) strategies of improving quality (including equity and relevance) in education delivery. Each discipline uses language in different ways—vocabulary, temporality, nominalizations, and so forth. Focusing on language allows all students, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity to move out of the periphery and become experienced members of the communities of practice in their fields (Lave & Wenger, 2001). Focusing on the language also allows students to be apprenticed into the field. While knowledge of specific discourses in various disciplines is growing, the intersections of those discourses remain unexplored. As both language and identity are social constructs, there is a need to continue to better understand the impact of the convergence of gender constructs with the language used in and across disciplines. Assessment of effective strategies to improve the quality of, in, and through education in the region is also greatly needed. At the completion of this initiative, there will be a better understanding of (1) the nature of disciplinary intersections among professional communities, (2) the synergistic effects of language and gender within the disciplines, and (3) analysis and authentication of high impact practices that improve student movement toward success. Participants will deliver scholarly and practical deliverables that address disciplinary literacy, greater access regardless of gender, and improved education quality.

Problem Statement

Throughout Egypt and MENA, youth increasingly find themselves in a state of NEET; that is “not in education, employment, or training”. Many young Egyptians with university education find there are insufficient employment opportunities, and this problem is exacerbated for the nation's women and poorest individuals in rural areas of the country. Gender disparity in employment presents significant challenges female university graduates face. Because the Ministries of Education and Technology and Higher Education, and The Ministry of Local Development are currently investing heavily in initiatives to improve quality, relevance, and equity in education, and the government is supporting these innovative initiatives, the present proposal is situated to make additional impact on the problem of youths' and women's unemployment.

Background

The Graduate School of Education at AUC is well suited to address these topics. Dr. Wolsey brings a wealth of experience in gender inequalities, racial disparities, and professional discourses to the project. The faculty of the academic unit is diverse with backgrounds in literacy, gender studies, and international education and they come from the United States, Lebanon, Egypt, and Ethiopia with experience in many regions of the world including Africa,

China, Central America, and the Middle East. Research has led us to findings that indicate while the breadth and depth of knowledge of specific disciplines are extensive (see Wolsey, 2010), there is little practical knowledge indicating the impact on secondary education and higher education or the intersections of disciplines across professions.

Significance

There are few studies in the region addressing the role of gender inequalities represented in the language used professionally, in civic discourse, or in the public sphere (see Habermas, 1989). Further, while discourse in various disciplines such as science, mathematics, literature are well-defined, the intersections of these disciplines in professional life are not defined very clearly (Wolsey et al, in press, Wolsey & Lapp, 2016, Wolsey et al., 2012). Understanding the various discourses and their intersections adds value in the marketplace and for informed citizens because the need to communicate clearly and with precision has, arguably, never been as acute.

Project description

The broad goal of this project is to develop a practical understanding of how language is used in and especially across various professional contexts in the MENA region. Power dynamics related to gender and socio-economic status will be explored as a means of explaining and remediating gender gaps in employment and addressing social mobility for young Egyptians and MENA citizens, particularly in rural areas.

Successful applicants will seek a degree in international and comparative education. The project team has identified existing coursework that addresses discourse analysis, gender studies, and international perspectives in education. Applicants will pursue the thesis track and will work with Dr. Wolsey as the main thesis supervisor. The project duration is 12 months, with research conducted over a period of 9 months and the thesis document completed over a period of 3 months.

The Advancement of Scientific Knowledge and Broader Impact

In addition to the development of the instruments described above and the research conducted through the thesis process, successful applicants will participate in international conference presentations, prepare a themed issue for a selected journal, and write for other top-tier publications. The Graduate School of Education will sponsor a conference on the combined topics of all successful applicants at AUC's historic Tahrir Square campus with invited participants and plenary speakers from throughout the Egyptian and MENA business and education communities. Finally, applicants will produce and maintain a blog and open access library that makes their work available to those around the region.

Biographical Sketches

Thomas DeVere Wolsey teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in education. His research focuses on literacies in the disciplines, intersections of technology and literacy, and literacy assessment practices. His work spans the globe from China to Guatemala to Egypt. 20+ years' intensive experience in education teaching English, social studies, and other elective classes in public schools. Successfully serves as an educational consultant both in the United States and internationally. Currently serves on the review boards of several journals, including *The Reading Teacher* and *The Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. Also published his articles on literacy and technology in journals such as *The Journal of Education*, and *The Journal of Literacy Research and Instruction*.

Leveraging Resources

The Graduate School of Education is the home to the Middle East Institute of Higher Education. MEIHE's influence and connections to rural schools and to the Supreme Council for Higher

Education. The GSE Centennial Lab project provides additional capacity to the unit through its digital content development component that reaches out to school teacher leaders throughout the country. Partners in the professional educator diploma program, ERASMUS+ offer additional resources for conducting this research.

Deliverables

Deliverables include a master thesis deposited at the Digital Archive and Research (DAR) Repository of the American University in Cairo, publically accessible. In addition, the results of the research project will be disseminated through recognized venues in the field, such as international conferences and/or journals. Furthermore, they include an open access repository for Gender Discourse and Professional Literacies in MENA with accompanying blog, as well as the development of assessment instruments to be used in instruction in basic and higher education and in business applications. These would be subject to copyright and/or patent.

Professional Development and Mentoring Plan

The selected student will be provided with a single-point of contact through the Graduate School of Education to help them adjust to life at The American University in Cairo and guide them to appropriate financial, residential, and academic resources. In addition, the Co-PI will act as the thesis supervisor of the student providing guidance for the development of the research plan, and through close supervision of the thesis work conducted would support the student in completing the work and disseminating the findings. Furthermore, the student will participate in 360-degree evaluations that help build an understanding of their strengths and build their ability to use such tools in the market place or public sector.

References

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